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By Rep. Charles F. Bass
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This month, the new federal prison in Berlin will surpass an important milestone in its opening: the first of the more than 100 minimum-security inmates will arrive, and more are expected by the end of October.

This is significant for several reasons, for as many of you in Berlin and the surrounding towns know, it has been a long and arduous process to get the prison opened.

The prison needlessly sat empty for more than year at taxpayer expense as Congress failed to produce a budget that would fund the activation of the new prison. This was unacceptable. When I returned to Congress, I immediately began to work with the House Appropriations Committee to prioritize funding for the opening of federal prisons that were constructed but not yet activated, such as Berlin, and I will continue to fight against any proposal that jeopardizes its funding, such as President Obama's attempt to have the Bureau of Prisons reprogram funding to purchase a state-owned prison in his home state of Illinois.

I am excited about the new possibilities the prison will present for New Hampshire's North Country. It will provide a much-needed economic boost to the North Country by providing 300 new jobs, encouraging new support start-ups and business expansion, and generating more revenue for the region.

But the prison is just one example of the North Country's revitalization, a result of the efforts of local and state officials, community leaders, and business owners to modernize and move this region's economy forward. Whether it's the opening of the new prison, the reinvigorated biomass plant and paper mills in Berlin and Gorham, or the hundreds of small businesses in the region that create jobs, the North Country's economy is stronger and new opportunities continue to emerge.

To ensure the North Country's economy is strong and vibrant, we need to protect the natural resources that help to fuel the region's top industries, including tourism, outdoor recreation, and forest products. New uses of the vast fiber available in our forests encourage not only the traditional uses of wood in our saw mills and paper mills, but as new forms of alternative energy and power. The beautiful landscape of the North Country remains a destination for tourists and outdoor enthusiasts alike. And the outdoor recreation industry in New Hampshire creates jobs at the marinas around our lakes, at ski areas, at hunting lodges, at ATV parks, and so many other places throughout our state, not to mention at manufacturing companies and retailers.

There's no question that our environment and our economy go hand-in-hand, and that couldn't be more evident in the North Country. That's why I support efforts to allow the land in the North Country to be used in a variety of ways for future generations.

And that's also why I remain opposed to the Northern Pass project as it stands now because of

the negative effect it will have on the North Country's landscape and way of life. I do not believe New Hampshire, and especially the North Country, should become the extension cord for the rest of New England and that a project that does not have the support of the people that it would impact the most should continue.

Every trip I make north of the Notches – and there have been many – reminds me of the new possibilities that await the North Country. In my meetings with constituents at local business visits, stop bys at senior centers in Berlin and Littleton, or at my town hall meetings in Berlin, Bath, Colebrook, and Jefferson, I am encouraged by their hopes for a new economic era for the North Country. I will continue to support and promote policies and initiatives that boost our economy and way of life while ensuring we protect the unique aspects of the North Country that make it truly special to our state.

Charles F. Bass represents New Hampshire's Second District in Congress and serves on the House Energy and Commerce Committee. You can reach him at <http://bass.house.gov>.